

# WEBSTER—MAN'S MAN

Author of "Cappy Ricks," "The Valley of the Giants," Etc.

By PETER B. KYNE

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## "TOO OLD!"

John Stuart Webster, mining engineer, boards a train in Death Valley, California, on his way back to civilization after cleaning up \$100,000. He looks like a hobo. Then he rescues a distressed lady, who makes his heart stop over. He eliminates the offending man. She is Dolores Rues. In Denver he is offered a \$100,000-a-year job by a capitalist friend, Edward J. Jefferies. He receives a delayed letter from his own particular pal, Billy Geary, asking him to finance a gold-mining proposition in Central America and an fifty-fifty with him on the profits. So he starts for Substante. Jerome goes with John to the depot. They meet the distressed lady on her way to the same train. John tells Jerome the whole story. Jerome secretly sees the girl, offering her \$1000 if she induces John to take his job inside of ninety days. The girl accepts. The scene now shifts to Buenaventura, Substante, where Geary has extended for two months on credit extended by Mother Jenks, keeper of a hotel and dancehouse. Dolores values Henrietta Watkins (Mother Jenks) that she is on her way to visit her. Mother Jenks has been educated Dolores, who is the daughter of former President Rues of Substante, deposed and executed by President Sarrus. Mother Jenks doesn't want Dolores to find out she is no longer respectable. So Billy meets the steamer and tries to turn the girl back. But Dolores lands and salutes Mother Jenks as "Mother." Billy promptly falls in love with Dolores. Webster in New Orleans secures a statement on La Estrada by buying a ticket for a mythical sale. "Andrew Hovers" in New Orleans Webster saves a young man from assassination. On the steamer he finds the mythical valet in his stateroom. He accepts "Hovers" on trust, without learning his identity.

## CHAPTER IX—Continued.

While he was considering the matter, a voice behind him said very softly and indistinctly, like a man with a harp:

"Mr. Geary, will you be good enough to back your launch a couple of hundred feet? When I'm certain I can't be seen from the steamer, I'll come aboard."

Billy turned, and in the dim light of his binnacle lamp observed a beautiful pair of white hands grasping the gunwale on the starboard quarter. He peered over and made out the head and shoulders of a man.

"All right," he replied in a low voice. "Hang where you are, and you'll be clear of the propeller."

He signaled Don Juan, who backed swiftly away, while Billy doused the binnacle lamp.

"That'll do," the thick voice said presently. "Bend a hand, friend, and I'll climb over."

He came, as naked as Mercury, sprawled on his belly in the cockpit, opened his mouth, spat out a compact little roll of tin foil, opened it and drew out a ball of paper which he flattened out on the floor of the cockpit and handed to Billy.

"Thank you," he said, very courteously and distinctly now. "My credentials, Mr. Geary, if you please."

Billy relighted the lamp and read:

"Dear Billy:

"I do not know the bearer from Adam's off ox; all I know about him is that he has all the outward marks of a gentleman, the courage of a bear-cat, a sense of humor and a head for which the president of Substante will gladly pay a considerable number of pesos oro. Don't get up the head, because I like it and we do not need the money—yet. Take him ashore without anybody knowing it; hide him, clothe him, feed him—then forget all about him."

"Ever thine,

"J. S. WEBSTER."

"Kick the boat ahead again, Cafferly," Billy ordered quietly. He turned to the late arrival. "Mr. Man, your credentials are all in apple-pie order. Do you happen to know that this bay is swarming with man-eating sharks?"

The man raised a fine, strong, youthful face and grinned at him. "Hobson's choice, Mr. Geary," he replied. "Afloat or ashore, the sharks are after me. Sir, I am your debtor." He crawled into the cabin and stretched out on the settee as John Stuart Webster's voice came floating across the dark waters.

"Everything well with you, Billy?"

"All is lovely, Jack, and the goose honks high. By the way, that friend of yours called with his letter of introduction. I took care of him."

"Thanks. I suppose you'll call for me in that launch tomorrow morning?"

"Surest thing you know, Jack. Good-night, old top."

"Good-night, Billy."

Don Juan Cafetero swung the launch and headed back for the city. At Leber's little dock Billy stepped ashore, while Don Juan backed out into the dark bay again in order to avoid inquisitive visitors. Billy hastened to El Buen Amigo and returned presently with a bundle of clothes; at an agreed signal Don Juan kicked the launch into the dock again and Billy went aboard.

"Hat, shirt, necktie, duck suit, white socks and shoes," he whispered. "Climb into them, stranger."

Once more the launch backed out in the bay, where Webster's protegee dressed at his leisure, and Billy handed Don Juan a couple of pesos.

"Remember, John," he cautioned the ubiquitous one as they tied up for the night, "nothing unusual happened tonight."

"Devil a thing, Mister Geary. Thank you, sir," the Gaelic wreck replied blithely and disappeared in the darkness, leaving Billy to guide the stranger to El Buen Amigo, where he was taken into the confidence of Mother Jenks and, on Billy's guarantee of the board bill, furnished with a room and left to his own devices.

John Stuart Webster came down the gangplank into Leber's launch hard at the heels of the port doctor.

"You young horse thief," he cried, affectionately. "I believe it's the custom down this way for men to kiss each other. We'll dispense with that, but by—!" He folded Billy in a paternal embrace, then held him at arm's length and looked him over.

"Lord, son," he said, "you're as thin as a snake. I'll have to feed you up."

As they sped toward the landing, he looked Billy over once more. "I have it," he declared. "You need a change of climate to get rid of that malaria. Just show me this little old mining claim of yours, Bill, and then hike for God's country. Three months up there will put you right again, and by the time you get back, we'll be about ready to weigh the first clean-up."

Billy shook his head. "I'd like to mighty well, Jack," he replied, "but I just can't."

"Huh! I suppose you don't think I'm equal to the task of straightening out this concession of yours and making a hummer out of it, eh?"

The young fellow looked across at him sheepishly. "Mine?" he jeered. "Who's talking about a mine, I'm thinking of a girl!"

"Oh!"

"Some girl, Johnny."

"I hope she's not some parakeet," Webster bantered. "Have you looked up her pedigree?"

"Ah-h-h!" Billy spat over the side in sheer disgust. "This is an American girl—born here but white—raised in the U. S. A. I've only known her three weeks, but—ah!" And Billy kissed his hand into space.

"Well, I'm glad I find you so happy, boy. When do you pull off the wedding?"

"Oh," said Billy, "that's premature, Jack. I haven't asked her. How could I until I'm able to support her?"

"Look here, son," Webster replied, "don't you go to work and be the kind of fool I was. You get married and take a chance. A man ought to marry young, Bill. Hang the odds. I know what's good for you."

At the hotel Billy sent a note to Dolores, apprising her that John Stuart Webster had arrived—and would she be good enough to receive them?

Miss Rues would be that gracious. She was waiting for them in the veranda just off the patio, outwardly calm, but inwardly a foment of conflicting emotions. As they approached she affected not to see them and turning glanced in the opposite direction; nor did she move her head until Billy's voice, speaking at her elbow, said:

"Well, Dolores, here's my old Jack-partner waiting to be introduced. Jack, permit me to present Miss Dolores Rues."

She turned her face and rose gracefully, marking with secret triumph the light of recognition that leaped to his eyes, hovered there the hundredth part of a second and departed, leaving those keen, quizzical blue orbs appraising her in the most natural manner imaginable. Webster bowed.

"It is a great happiness to meet you, Miss Rues," he said gravely. Dolores gave him her hand. "You have doubtless forgotten, Mr. Webster, but I think we have met before."

"Indeed!" John Stuart Webster murmured interestedly. "So stupid of me not to remember. Where did we meet?"

"He has a profound sense of humor," she soliloquized. "He's going to force me into the open. Oh, dear, I'm helpless." Aloud she said: "On the train in Death valley last month, Mr. Webster."

Webster shook his head slowly, as if mystified. "I fear you're mistaken, Miss Rues. I wasn't on the train in Death valley last month. I was in Denver—so you must have met some other Mr. Webster."

She flushed furiously. "I didn't think I could be mistaken," she answered a trifle coldly.

"It is my misfortune that you were," he replied graciously. "Certainly, had we met at that time, I should not have failed to recognize you now. Somehow, Miss Rues, I never have any luck."

She was completely outgeneraled, and having the good sense to realize it, submitted gracefully. "He's perfectly horrible," she told herself, "but at least he can be like a gentleman—and I always did like that kind of man."

So they chatted on the veranda until luncheon was announced and Dolores left them to go to her room.

"Well!" Billy queried the moment

she was out of earshot. "What do you think, Johnny?"

"I think," said John Stuart Webster slowly, "that you're a good picker, Bill. She's my ideal of a fine young woman, and my advice to you is to marry her. I'll grub-stake you. Bill, this stiff collar is choking me; I wish you'd wait here while I go to my room and rustle up a soft one."

In the privacy of his room John Stuart Webster sat down on his bed and held his head in his hands, for he had just received a blow in the solar plexus and was still groggy. Presently, however, he pulled himself together and approaching the mirror looked long at his weather-beaten countenance.

"Too old," he murmured, "too old to be dreaming dreams."

He changed to a soft collar, and when he descended to the patio to join Billy once more he was, to all outward appearances, his usual unperturbed self, for his was one of those rare natures that can derive a certain comfort from the misery of self-sacrifice—and in that five minutes alone in his room John Stuart Webster had wrestled with the tragedy of his life and won.

He had resolved to give Billy the right of way on the highway to happiness.

In Mr. Webster's own whimsical phraseology, his clock had been fixed, on the instant he recognized in the object of his youthful partner's adoration the same winsome woman he had enthroned in his own secret castle of love. From that precise second Billy's preserve was as safe from encroachment by his friend as would be a bale of Confederate currency in an armor-plated vault on the three-thousand-foot level of a water-filled mine.

John Stuart Webster had unanimously pursued upon the course he should have pursued in the first place. He would investigate Billy's mining concession immediately; provided it should prove worth while, he would finance it and put the property on a paying basis; after which he would see to it that the very best doctors in the city of Buenaventura should inform Billy, unofficially and in the strictest confidence, that if he desired to preserve the life of Senior Juan Webster he should forthwith pack that rapidly disintegrating person off to a more salubrious climate.

Having made his decision, John Stuart Webster immediately took heart of hope and decided to lead trumps. Dolores rejoined them for a siesta after luncheon.

Webster leaned over and slapped Billy Geary's knees affectionately.

"Well, Bill, you saffron-colored old wreck, how long do you suppose it will take for you to pick up enough strength and courage to do some active mining? I'm anxious to get that property on a paying basis, so I can get out of the country."

"Why, Johnny," the amazed Billy declared, "I thought you would stay and help run the mine."

"Indeed! Well, why do you suppose I spent so much time teaching you how to run a mine, you young idiot, if not against just such a time as this? You found this concession and tied it up; I'll finance it and help you get everything started; but after that, I'm through, and you can manage it on salary and name the salary yourself. You have a greater interest in this country than I, William; and so with your kind permission I'll hike up to that concession tomorrow and give it the double-O; then, if I can O. K. the property, we'll cable for the machinery I ordered just before I left Denver, and get busy. We ought to have our first clean-up within ninety days."

"Gosh, but you're in a hurry," Billy murmured. He disliked exceedingly the thought of having his courtship interrupted on a minute's notice.

"You know me, son. I'm a hustler on the job," Webster reminded him brutally; "so the sooner you start, the sooner you can get back and accumulate more malaria. What accommodations have you up there?"

"None, Jack."

"Then you had better get some, Billy. I think you told me we have to take horses at San Miguel de Padua to ride in to the mine." Billy nodded. "Then you had better buy a tent and bedding for both of us, ship the stuff up to San Miguel de Padua. Go up with it and engage horses, a good cook, and a couple of reliable muzzos. When you have everything ready telegraph me and I'll come up."

"Why can't you come up with me?" Billy demanded.

"I have to see a man, and write some letters and send a cablegram and wait for an answer. I may have to loaf around here for two or three days. By the way, what did you do for that friend I sent to you with the letter of introduction?"

"Exactly what you told me to do, Johnny."

"Where is he now?"

"At El Buen Amigo—the same place where I'm living."

"All right. When you get back to your hotel, you might tell my friend I shall expect him over to dine with me this evening, if he can manage it."

For an hour they discussed various subjects; then Billy, declaring the siesta was almost over and the shops reopening as a consequence, announced his intention of doing his shopping, said good-bye to Dolores and Webster, and lugubriously departed on the business in hand.

"Why are you in such a hurry, Mr. Webster?" Dolores demanded. "You haven't been in Buenaventura six hours until you've managed to make me perfectly miserable."

"I'm terribly sorry. I didn't mean to."

"Didn't you know Billy Geary is my personal property?"

"No, but I suspected he might be Billy's generous that way. He never hesitates to give himself to a charming woman."

"This was a case of mutual self-defense. Billy hasn't any standing socially, you know. When old Mrs. General Maldonado lectured me (the dear, aristocratic soul conceived it to be her duty) on the impropriety of appearing on the Malecon with Billy and my guardian, who happens to be Billy's landlady, I tried to explain our American brand of democracy, but failed. So I haven't been invited anywhere since, and life would have been very dull without Billy. He has been a dear—and you have taken him away."

Webster laughed. "Well, be patient, Miss Rues, and I'll give him back to you with considerable more money than he will require for your joint comfort. Billy in financial distress is a joy forever, but Billy in a top hat and a frock coat on the sunny side of Easy street will be absolutely irresistible."

"He's a darling. Ever since my arrival he has dedicated his life to keeping me amused," she rose. "Despite your wickedness, Mr. Webster, I am going to be good to you. Billy and I always have five o'clock tea here in the veranda. Would you care to come to my tea-party?"

"Nothing could give me greater pleasure," he assured her.

She nodded brightly to him. "I'm going to run up to my room and put some powder on my nose," she explained.

"But you'll return before five o'clock!" Webster was amazed to hear himself plead.

"You do not deserve such consideration, but I'll come back in about twenty minutes," she answered and left him.

As Webster viewed the situation, his decision to see as little as possible of Dolores during his brief stay in Substante was a wise one. The less he saw of her (he told himself), the better for his peace of mind, for he was forty years old, and he had never loved before. For him this fever that burned in his blood, this delicious agony that throbbled in his heart—and all on the very ghost of provocation—were so many danger-signals, heralds of that grand passion which, coming to a man of forty, generally lasts him the remainder of his natural existence.

Webster was forced to admit he was afraid of himself. His was the rapidly disappearing code of the old unfettered West, that a man shall never betray his friend in thought, word, or deed. To John Stuart Webster any crime against friendship was the most heinous in all the calendar of human frailty; even to dream of slipping into Billy's shoes now would be monstrous; yet Webster knew he could not afford a test of strength between his ancient friendship for Billy and the masculine desire for a perfect mate. Remained then but one course:

"I must run like a road-runner," was the way Webster expressed it.

## CHAPTER X.

Dolores had been gone an hour before Webster roused from his bitter introspection sufficiently to glance at his watch. "Hum-m-m!" he grunted disapprovingly.

"Oh, I've been here fully half an hour," Dolores' voice assured him. He turned guiltily and found her leaning against the jamb in a doorway behind him and farther down the veranda. She was gazing at him with that calm, impersonal yet vitally interested glance that had so captivated him the first time he saw her. "Are you quite finished talking to yourself and fighting imaginary enemies? If so, you might talk to me for a change; I'll even disagree with you on any subject, if opposition will make you any happier."

He rose and indicated the chair. "Please sit down, Miss Rues. You are altogether disconcerting—too confoundingly smart. I fear I'm going to be afraid of you until I know you better."

She shrugged adorably and took the proffered chair. "That's the Latin in her—that shrug," Webster thought. "I wonder what other mixtures go to make up that perfect whole."

Aloud he said: "So you expect to study me in repose? Why waste your time? I am asleep in repose."

"Feminine coquetry," Mr. Webster

Billy has talked so much of you that I wanted to see if you measured up to the specifications. Just let me have your hand, and I'll tell you all about yourself."

"Is there any charge?"

"Yes, a nominal one. However, I guarantee a truthful reading; if, when I am through, you are not wholly satisfied, you do not have to pay the price. Is that a satisfactory arrangement?"

"Right as a fox," he declared, and held out his great calloused hand. He thrilled as she took it in both of hers, so soft and beautiful, and flattened it out, palm upward, on her knee. "A fine, large, useful hand," she commented musingly. "The callouses indicate recent hard manual toil with a pick and shovel; despite your recent efforts with soap and brush and pumice-stone, there still remain evidence of some foreign matter ingrained in those callous spots. This line indicates that you are very brave, gentle, and courteous. You are quick and firm in your decisions, but not always right, because your actions are governed by your heart instead of your head. Once you have made a decision, you are reckless of the consequences. Your lifetime tells me you are close to fifty-three years of age."

"Seems, you're shooting high and to the right," he interrupted, for he did not relish that jab about his age. "I'll have you know I was forty years old last month, and that I can still do a hundred yards in twelve seconds flat—in my working clothes."

"Well, don't feel peeved about it, Mr. Webster. I am not infallible; the best you can hope for from me is a high percentage of hits, even if I do shoot high and to the right that time. In point of worldly experience you're a hundred and six years old but I lopped off fifty per cent. to be on the safe side. To continue. You are of an extremely chivalrous nature—particularly toward young ladies traveling without chaperons; you are kind, affectionate, generous to a fault, something of a spendthrift. One may safely depend upon you to do the unexpected. Your matrimonial line is unbroken, proving you have never married, although right here the line is somewhat dim and frayed. She looked up at him suddenly. "You haven't been in love, have you?" she queried with childlike innocence. "In love—and disappointed?"

He nodded, for he could not trust himself to speak.

"How sad!" she cooed sympathetically. "Did she marry another, or did she die?"

"She—she—yes, she died."

"Caution! tongue, in all probability, carried her off, poor thing! However, to your fortune: You are naturally truthful and would not make a deliberate misstatement of fact unless you had a very potent reason for it. You have a strong sense of sportsmanship, and when fairly defeated, whether in a battle of fists or a battle of wits, you never hold a grudge, which is one of the very nicest characteristics a man can have."

"Or a woman," he suggested feebly.

Correct. Teacher—Who lived in the Garden of Eden? Kid—The Adames.



Beauty Secrets for Women

A woman's fondest hope is to stay young. She often resorts to paints, powders and cosmetics to hide her years. Some women pay large sums to so-called "Beauty Doctors" in the belief that money will buy youth. Others wear girlish dresses, thinking they can fool the world about their age. But no one is deceived. The more you try to hide your age, the more it shows.

There is but one thing that holds old age back, and that is health. Sickness and weakness bring old age early in life. Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription is a building-up medicine for women. It makes them healthy and strong when they suffer from women's troubles. It keeps them looking young by keeping them well. It is a woman's tonic for the frail, the delicate and those who are nervous, dizzy and who have backache and dragging pains. Favorite Prescription is altogether vegetable and without a particle of alcohol. It is safe to take. Try it now. In tablet or liquid form at all druggists, or send 10c for trial package of the tablets to Dr. Pierce's Invalids' Hotel in Buffalo, N. Y.

This is said to be the age of young men. It may be; but the old men manage every age.

Cuticura for Sore Hands.

Soak hands on retiring in the hot suide of Cuticura Soap, dry and rub in Cuticura Ointment. Remove surplus Ointment with tissue paper. This is only one of the things Cuticura will do if Soap, Ointment and Talcum are used for all toilet purposes.—Adv.

Correct. Teacher—Who lived in the Garden of Eden? Kid—The Adames.

Back Given Out?

There's surely some reason for that lame, aching back. Likely it's your kidneys. A cold or strain sometimes congests the kidneys and slows them up. That may be the reason for that nagging backache, those sharp pains that travel down-out feeling. You may have head-aches and dizzy spells, too, with annoying bladder irregularity. Use Doan's Kidney Pills. They have helped thousands. Ask your neighbor.

A Missouri Case

Mrs. A. C. Hunt, Kansas City, Mo., writes: "There was a lame back and nervous and a dull, heavy head. I was nervous and often affected by spells of dizziness and blurred eyesight. My kidneys didn't act properly. I bought Doan's Kidney Pills and used three boxes. They gave me complete relief. I always keep them on hand to use if I should ever be troubled again."

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PISO'S

It is believed that potatoes were first grown in South America and that the Spaniards took them back to Europe when they overran Peru. Potatoes were later introduced to Italy, France, England, Ireland and to North America, in the order named.